

**SCRA Community Psychology Practice Council**

**Community Psychology Practitioner Profiles Project**

**Tom Wolff, Ph.D.**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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| <b>Job Title</b>                 | President   |
| <b>Workplace</b>                 | Tom Wolff and Associates  |
| <b>Location</b>                  | Amherst, Massachusetts  |
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| <b>Professional Affiliations</b> | Society for Community Research and Action; American Public Health Association |

**Please describe the work you do, for pay, as a community psychologist, including the setting(s) where you work?**

- Private Consulting Practice
- Focus on collaborative solutions - coalition building, community development
- Work with: non profits, government, foundations
- At local, state, national, international level

Over the years have worked in formal settings: college mental health, community mental health centers, medical school outreach programs.

I have worked on a very broad range of issues.

Presently I am focused on clients working on: health disparities, education reform (Harlem Children's Zone type models), systems change and food access, substance abuse, healthy community leadership, community health centers, community approaches to domestic violence, public health systems, HIV

### **What training/education do you have in community psychology?**

Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at University of Rochester 1969

Community psychology training was almost all post degree since the field was just emerging in 1969 when I graduated

### **Please describe how your training/education contributed to your work as a community psychologist. What do you view as the most important skills you learned in your training as a community psychologist.**

I was trained before there was a CP specialty - really as CP, prevention and Community Mental Health were emerging. Emory Cowen ran the program at Rochester so we got a taste of the emerging field. Skills learned in training: becoming a good listener, taking a history (good for communities as well as individuals, group process was critical to my CP work

### **What other experiences or training have contributed to or enhanced your ability to work as a community psychologist?**

- Lots of workshops, small group processes, seminars after graduateschool
- Lots of organizing, protest, political activity - learned a lot there

Working with colleagues (i.e. Carolyn Swift and the Council on Consultation, Education and Prevention of the Natl Council of Community Mental Health Centers). Special colleagues and mentors, Carolyn, George Albee, Julian Rappaport (classmate at Rochester), Bill Berkowitz, Steve Fawcett, Gillian Kaye (community organizing and training) Linda Bowen (peace promotion)- many others

**Are there other ways you use your community psychology background and training, either unpaid or in paid roles other than your primary work?**

I have always been actively involved in my community and in politics - I am not too sure that community psychology informs that work - as much as there is a mutual exchange between my political work and my community psychology work.

I now help organize an Interfaith Group on Social Change and Spirituality.

Historically I was: elected member of the town and region's School Committee, chair of my town's Democratic Committee for 10 years, chair of the town's Affordable Housing committee, chair of the school playground committee. Bd member of the Karuna Center an international non profit focused on peace building and reconciliation.

**What advice might you give to students or people considering community psychology as a career?**

Community psychology is a wonderful field with great opportunity to actually act on issues of importance at a level of large scope - can actually be involved in creating community change and grassroots levels, or national or state levels.

It is never boring - the issues always change in terms of who has money to hire you - substance abuse, violence prevention, smoking cessation, healthy communities, food and fitness, health disparities, etc. One can act with an ecological understanding of behavior so that you can address systems not just individuals.

I have always made a living doing this and felt like I was doing important work.

I have a tendency to speak truth to power so have lost my fair share of jobs, which is painful at the moment but I always found that it moved me on to something more important and better for me.